

Laboratory notebooks

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Starting with a broader picture

- Maintaining good notebooks is essential for all sorts of activities, ranging from scientific research to the arts.
- Writing notebooks is part of a much broader endeavor: the creation, documentation and dissemination of knowledge.
- There are many resources available regarding scientific writing, including lab notebooks. The book "The art of scientific writing: from student reports to professional publications in chemistry and related fields", by H.F. Ebel, C. Bliefert, and W.E. Russey (Wiley, 2004, available from Google books) is a good example.

The need for documentation

- Virtually all employers in the fields of science and engineering require employees to document their activities through the generation of internal reports, patents, presentations, papers in trade magazines and scientific journals, etc.
- Laboratory notebooks are the basic source of information for most of these forms of communication and dissemination.
- We will use the words "lab notebook" to describe all sorts
 of basic research records (no matter if you work in a lab, or
 run simulations, or write code, or whatever)

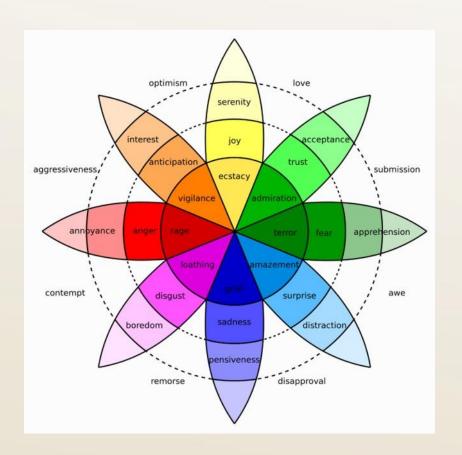
The need for documentation

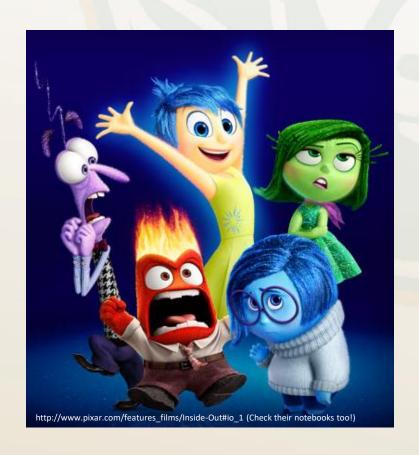
- Employers require good documentation for a number of reasons, including securing intellectual property, keeping projects on track, reducing training and knowledge transfer time, complying with regulations, etc.
- But you should see that there good reasons for you to do it anyways: among many other benefits it will minimize time wasted, and it will show that you are a professional someone who cares enough to write down and analyze what he/she does.

The need for documentation

- Many people from the younger generations like to document every instant of their day using tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, etc.
- If you have chosen well, you are working on something you love. Isn't a day at the lab worth documenting with comparable level of detail? (hopefully with tools allowing far more time persistence than Snapchat...)

Scientists and engineers are just people, no matter what they say...





You don't have supernatural memory capabilities, and you're subject to mood swings and memory bias like everyone else. But the result of your research will be subject to really high standards of accuracy and reproducibility.

The notebook is your loyal companion

- While working in the lab, one goes through a number of different emotions.
 In any case, documenting is one of the best ways to deal with with these emotional states. For example:
- Excitement: Things are going great! Progress is extremely fast, adrenaline is high - it feels you could go on forever. Better document what you're doing, excitement and fast progress may quickly lead to forgotten details and irreproducible results.
- Boredom: It is time to run 250 different iterations of your experiment, or simulation, or whatever. Unmanaged tediousness will make your mind wonder, you will lose focus and possibly become sloppy. Better document what you'll be doing, what's the plan and clear steps, check things as they get done.

The notebook is your loyal companion

- Puzzlement: You can't make any sense of things. Results are strange or unexpected – is there anything wrong with the setup, or my code? In trying to understand, you'll rapidly change quite a few things – perhaps some of them at the same time. Better document what are you doing – you will quickly forget what you changed and when. Who knows – perhaps the thing that looks strange is the most interest result you have ever had!
- Sadness: Your experiment failed, despite your best efforts. You feel like shutting everything down and going away for two weeks to clear up your mind. Perhaps this is indeed the best thing you could do. Better document right away: there are usually valuable lessons that can be derived from failure, and you'll forget everything by the time you're back.

The notebook is your loyal companion

- You don't know exactly what's coming. Some of your work will be well defined and perhaps routinary, but some of your best results will not be planned. So it is good to keep comprehensive notes.
- We'll be talking about paper notebooks and pens.
 There are also options in electronic media, and most of
 our comments will apply to either one. But just
 remember: we can still read Newton's notebooks
 written in the 1600s, while I can't read the floppies I
 used 10 years ago.

Purpose of lab notebook

- The purpose of a lab notebook is to keep a record of your activities (experiments, simulations, theoretical derivations, etc.) so you or someone else could repeat your work or understand exactly how it was done. The notebook is evidence of your work.
- Here are some purposes for a lab notebook:
 - Describing experiments and activities: reasons for experiments, how were they performed, what were the results.
 - Compiling data/charts/photos/ideas
 - It is a place where to find clues to troubleshoot problems
 - It is also a place to think and observe the whole picture
 - It serves as a legal document, to prove discoveries and patents
 - It can be used as defense against accusations of fraud or lawsuits

What do you write in a notebook

- Various disciplines may have slightly different conventions on how to write lab notebooks, and what to include.
- Here are some typical examples:
 - Complete description of experiments (reasons, setup, etc.)
 - Complete record of procedures, data, and thoughts to pass to others researchers (including your future self!)
 - Computer generated data, photos, printouts, all other data
 - Hand-made graphs (make as you go to quickly see trends and perhaps make decisions)
 - Datasheets, product labels, names of providers/vendors
 - Notes (or pasted copies) of discussions, conversations, emails, readings related to your goals and/or activities
 - Locations of equipment, sensors, etc.
 - Items that can't be fitted in the notebook may be kept on a separate folder or storage location. Always cross-reference these materials and corresponding pages in the notebooks.

A simple template for daily annotations

- 1. Date
- 2. Objective of the day. Short paragraph describing what is objective of the day, problem to be solved. The technique to be used. It can simply refer to the previous day, annotating any change
- 3. Clear diagram of the set up with sufficient detail to be reproduced. Again it can refer to a previous diagram, and only annotate any modification.
- 4. Data. All data is recorded, included "bad shots" with conditions at which they are taken and comments.. Reference to digital data location
- 5. Graphs/plots of results must be included
- 6. Main conclusions, including what might have gone wrong!

DOs and DON'Ts for keeping lab notebooks

- 1. Do use bound books (good, acid-free paper)
- 2. Do sign and date
- 3. Do use ink (no pencil, please)
- 4. Don't leave blank spaces
- 5. Don't modify (do not modify written records, and do not erase strike through instead. NEVER remove pages)
- 6. Do use past tense
- 7. Do explain abbreviations and special terms
- 8. Do staple attachments (do not leave loose pieces of paper in your notebook)
- 9. Don't remove originals (make your own copies, if allowed)
- 10. Do outline new experiments
- 11. Do record lab meeting discussions
- 12. Do provide detail
- 13. Do track notebooks
- 14. Do save completed notebooks

Some helpful tips

- Always record as you go
- Write legibly
- Don't hesitate in cutting and gluing material to your notebook – it is better than trying to transcribe the information. Use acid-free glue or high quality tape.
- A table of contents is very useful. You can leave room for it when you start a new notebook, and fill it up as you go.

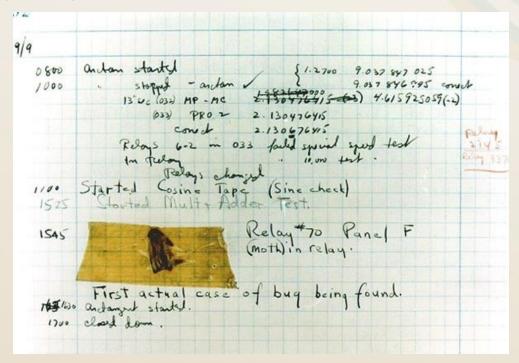
More useful tips

- When you work for others, you do not own "your" notebook. Your employer does.
- Do not remove notebooks from the lab, unless there is express permission to do so.
- You may ask for a copy. Depending on the specifics of your employer's intellectual property agreement (usually signed by you on the first day of employment) you may be allowed a copy. Also, make sure you're aware of the record retention policies of your employer.

SOME EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH NOTEBOOKS

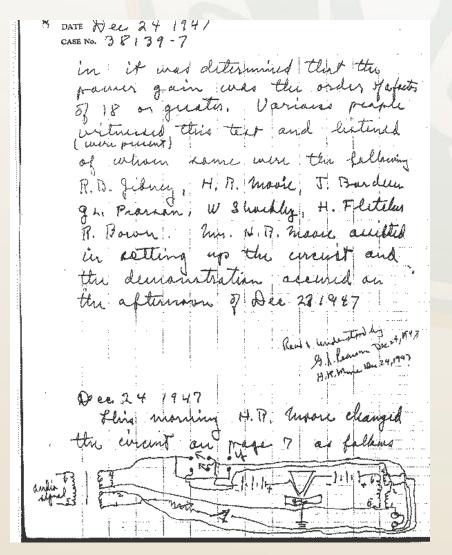
First instance of actual computer bug being found

September 9, 1945. At 3:45 p.m., Grace Murray Hopper records the first computer bug in her log book as she worked on the Harvard Mark II. The problem was traced to a moth stuck between a relay in the machine, which Hopper duly taped into the Mark II's log book with the explanation: "First actual case of bug being found."

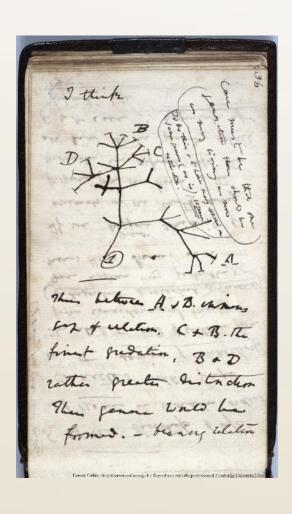


First transistor

Walter Brattain, December 24, 1947: This page records the moment when the first transistor was shown to the higher-ups at Bell Labs. A microphone and headphones were connected to the transistor, and the device was actually spoken over "with no noticeable change in quality" writes Brattain. On the page is listed the people who were there to witness the occasion, including Gibney, Moore, Bardeen Pearson, Shockley and others.



Darwin's notebooks



Darwin kept his notebooks by his side throughout his voyage on the HMS Beagle. During his journey, he filled dozens of notebooks with his scientific discoveries as well as general musings and mundane lists. When making zoological and botanical observations, he would write every detail of a species' variations as well as sketch drawings of the subject for reference. Much of what Darwin kept in his notebooks ended up in his revolutionary On the Origin of Species. Here is one of Darwin's sketches of an evolutionary tree, the very first of its kind.

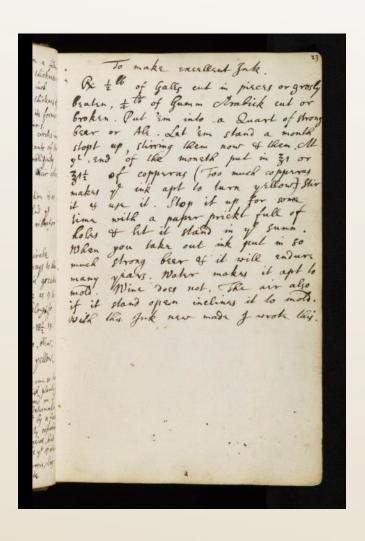
Newton's notebooks



Newton's Waste Book:

Much of Newton's important work on calculus is developed in this large notebook, which he began using in 1664 when he was away from Cambridge due to the plague.

Newton's notebooks

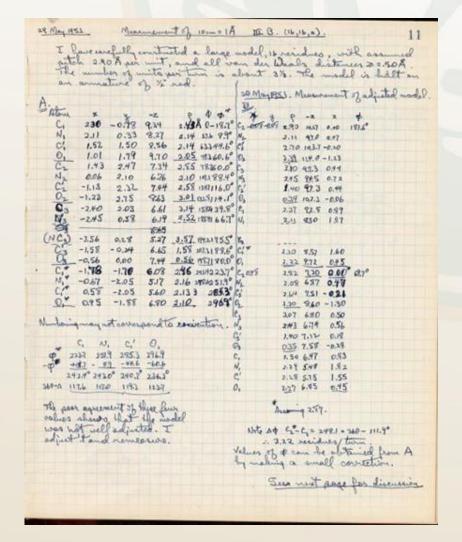


Laboratory Notebook (MS Add.3975)

Newton's notes on optics, precious stones, colors, temperatures, salts, medical matters, alchemy and other subjects, in English and Latin, c. 1669-c.1693.

Linus Pauling: Protein α-helix

 May 29, 1951. In this page from Linus Pauling's lab notebook, he describes his discovery of the protein alpha-helix. He won his first Nobel prize in 1954 for the work described here, the first real insight into the 3D structure of proteins.



Fairchild Semiconductor: Genesis of Silicon Valley



Some notebooks from Fairchild



Transistor chip photos from Gordon Moore's notebook

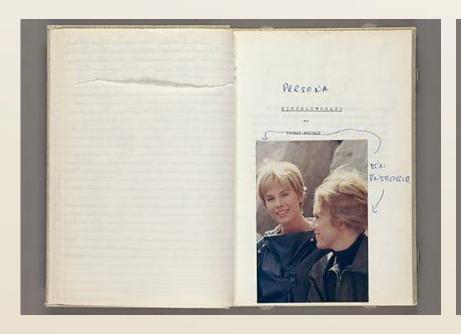
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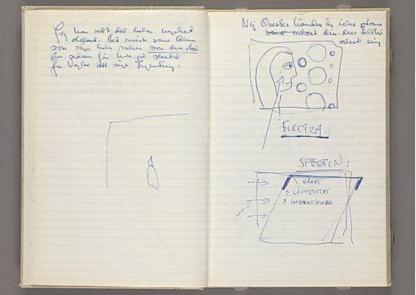
First page of Robert Noyce's IC patent disclosure

http://www.computerhistory.org/atchm/the-fairchild-semiconductor-collection-of-notebooks-and-technical-papers/

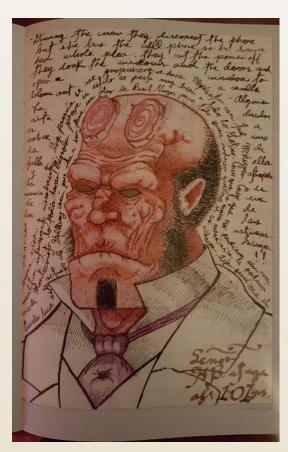
Ingmar Bergman: Persona

Persona is a 1966 B&W Swedish film written and directed by Ingmar Bergman and starring Bibi Andersson and Liv Ullmann. The film is shot and set in Sweden and deals with the themes of illness, bleakness, death and insanity. It is considered one of the major works of the 20th century.





Guillermo del Toro: Hellboy





Notebooks as Idea Incubators

"Before I start shooting a movie, I read all the notebooks. They travel with me. I consider the notebooks a catalog... like a mail-order catalog of ideas... I like to say that we make only one movie in our lifetime – a movie made of all the images of all our movies... I think these books are important to me because they narrate the story of that single movie I'm trying to make."

SOME EXAMPLES CLOSER TO HOME

REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC INSTRUMENTS 79, 013503 (2008)

Spectroscopically pure metal vapor source for highly charged ion spectroscopy and capillary discharge soft x-ray lasers

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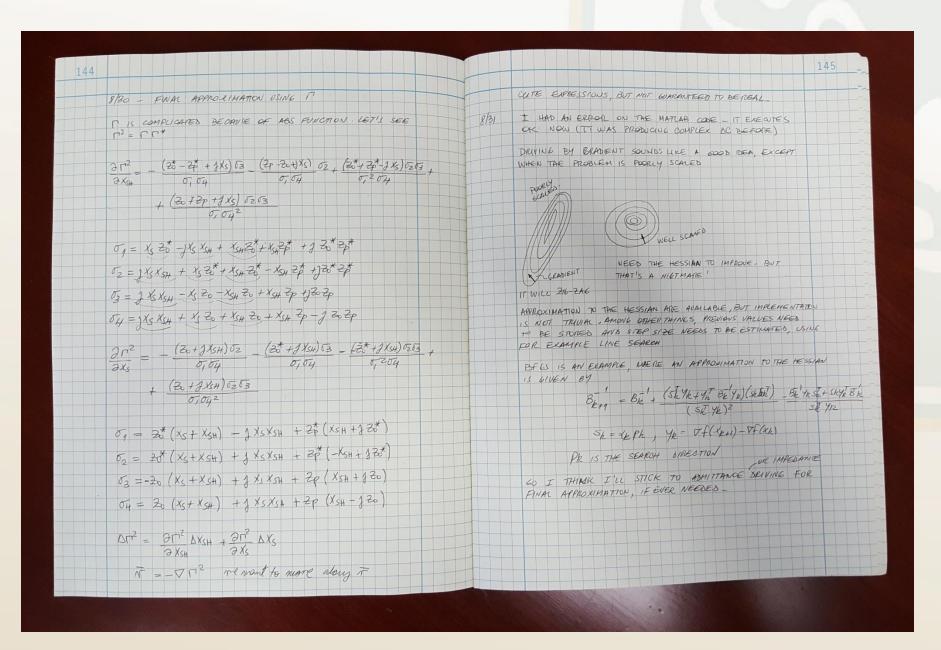
NSF Center for Extreme Ultraviolet Science and Technology and Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523, USA and Department of Physics, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado 80523, USA

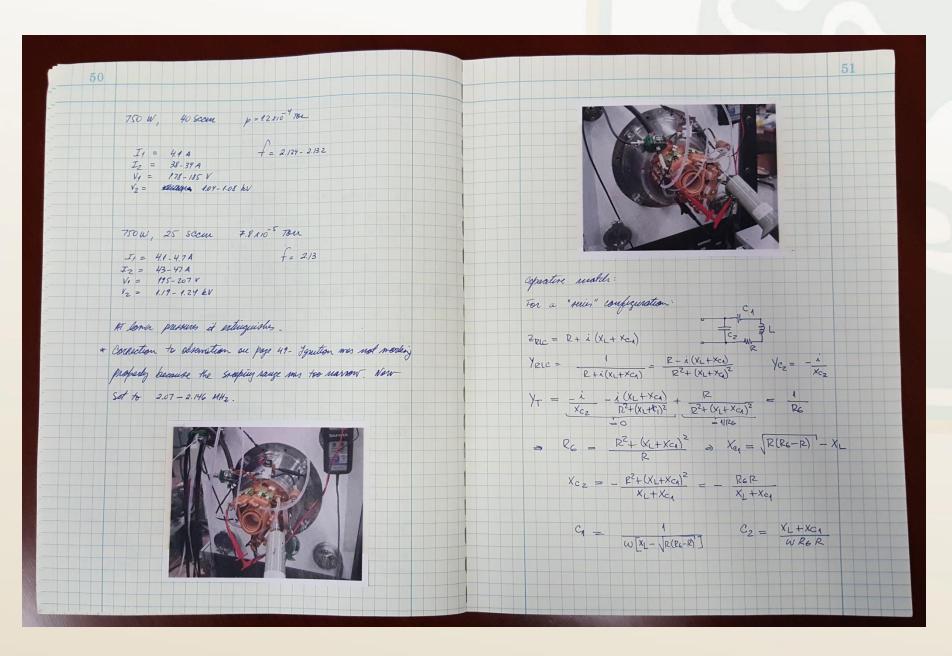
(Received 18 August 2007; accepted 26 November 2007; published online 17 January 2008)

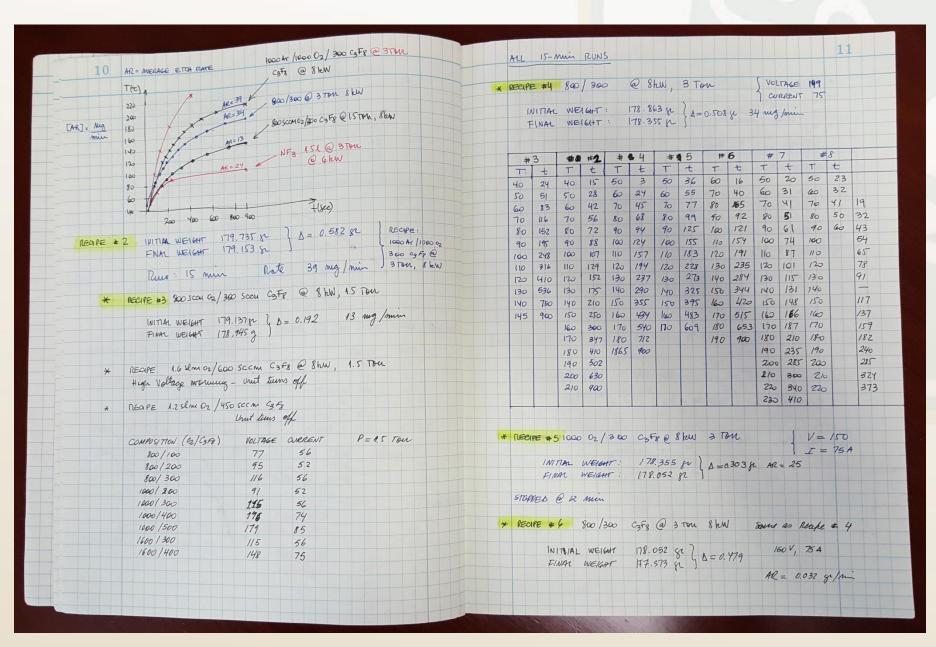
We describe a compact, pulsed metal vapor source used for the production of dense plasma columns of interest for both soft x-ray laser research and spectroscopy of highly ionized plasmas. The source generates spectroscopically pure cadmium vapor jets in a room-temperature environment by rapidly heating an electrode with a capacitive discharge. In the configuration described herein, the metal vapor jet produced by the source is axially injected into a fast (up to 15 kA/ns), high current (up to 200 kA peak) capillary discharge to generate highly ionized cadmium plasma columns. Spectroscopic analysis of the discharge emission in the 12–25 nm spectral range evidences the dominance of Cu-like (CdXX) and Ni-like (CdXXI) lines and shows strong line emission at 13.2 nm from the $4d~^1S_0$ – $4p~^1P_1$ laser transition of Ni-like Cd. Hydrodynamic/atomic physics simulations performed to describe the dynamics of the plasma column and compute the optimum discharge conditions for laser amplification are discussed. © 2008 American Institute of Physics.

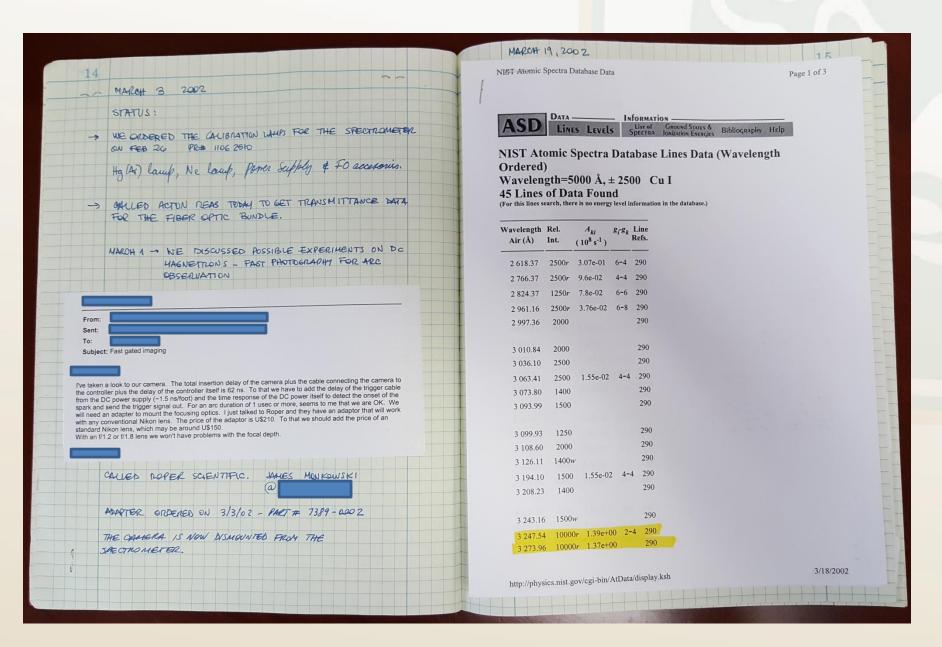
[DOI: 10.1063/1.2825459]

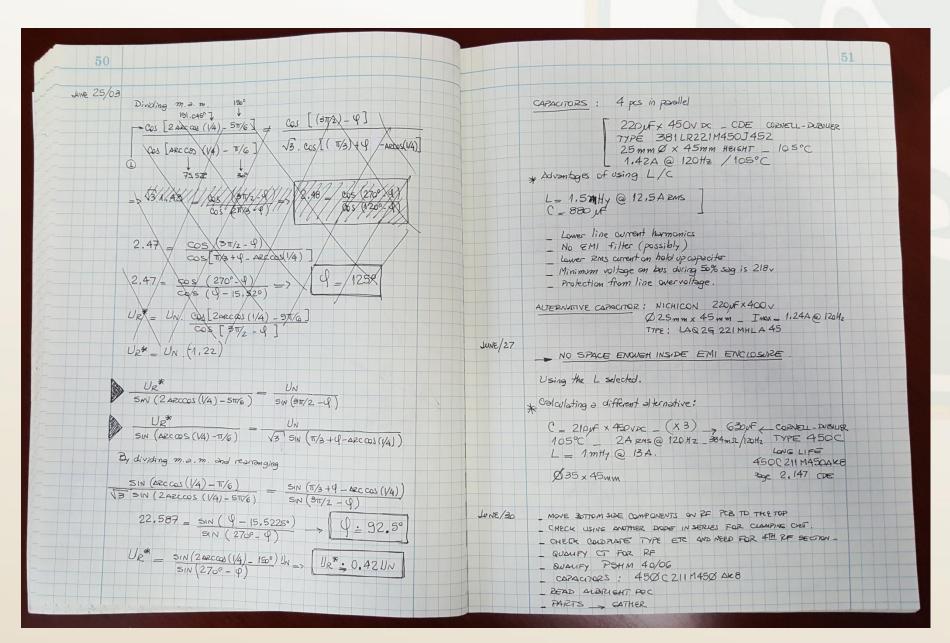
A paper published about eight years after the experiments were performed. Writing the paper was made possible, in part, by meticulous record keeping.

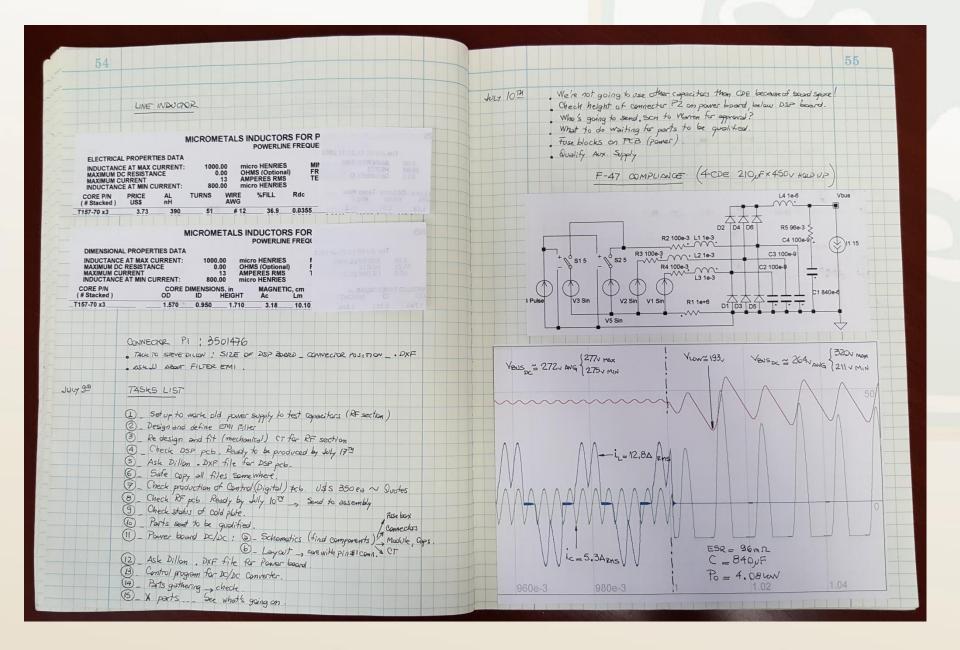












Summary

- Maintaining good notebooks is essential for all sorts of activities, ranging from scientific research to the arts.
- Writing notebooks is part of a much broader endeavor: the creation, documentation and dissemination of knowledge. Discovery without communication is not worth much to others.
- If nothing else, you should do it for your own sake: among many other benefits it will help you to continuously improve your work and your communication skills, it will minimize time wasted, and it will show that you are a professional - someone who cares enough to write down and analyze what he/she does.

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